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ABSTRACT

National recognition of the correlation between rural and urban problems has brought about an atmosphere of confidence relative to the future of the rural and/or small school. Such confidence is evidenced by: (1) renewed interest and concern over the plight of rural education by society in general; (2) Federal commitment in recognition of the fact that "rural" exists, that rural society has problems, and that the Federal Government must play a major role in providing solutions; (3) commitment of the National Institute of Education to the Rural Experimental School Program; (4) the continual funding of the Educational Resources Information Center/Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS); (5) emergence of Regional Education Service agencies (educational corporations) designed to serve rural and small schools; (6) linkage between the Appalachian Regional Lab and local school districts in moving from the development stage to actual program implementation; (7) re-emergence of the "Community School" concept; (8) the myriad of agencies and organizations at the local, state, and national levels concerned with rural problems and education; (9) the movement by teachers and teacher organizations to improve the quality of rural education; (10) conferences which provide impetus for rural community improvement through the schools. (JC)

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CONFERENCE PAPER

"THE FUTURE OF THE RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOL"

BY

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THE FUTURE OF THE RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOL

There is renewed interest and concern over the plight of our rural people. This concern covers the whole spectrum of rural society including its educational program. The term "rural" although not precisely defined, is better understood by a wider segment of our population than was true 40 years ago. No longer is it a term which implies derision, ridicule, scorn, and indicating an inferior way of life, but rather it signifies what is right in America.

In line with this new understanding is a widespread interest in helping to solve the problems of rural residents. Perhaps this awareness is due in part to the realization that the "urban crisis" will not be solved in isolation and without solving the "Rural crisis."

One example of this new realization is the policy enunciated by Congress that one of our goals be to seek a balanced population between urban and rural. It is well known that in the last 4 decades almost 40 million people have left rural areas for the big city. This mass migration, perhaps the largest in the history of the world, has been in many ways both unfortunate and undesirable. Unfortunate in that many of those who migrated found neither improved economic status nor job satisfaction. In fact one of the prime concerns of the urban crisis stems from the hordes of economically and socially deprived and displaced persons from farms, villages, and small towns into urban centers which have been poorly equipped to absorb them. Undesirable, because as a result of this migration the towns and villages left behind withered away. Thus on the one hand, it brought crime, congestion, pollution, hordes of unskilled laborers, and bureaucratic local government and on the other, it left behind deteriorating - economically - socially - educationally - local communities. Because of this mass migration, the quality of

life in both urban and rural areas have suffered. It appears that the migration has stopped and even been reversed.

Current data seem to indicate that there has been a slight net migration from the city to the country side. The effect of the energy crisis on the rural - urban population is unknown.

A current example of the federal commitments to rural America is the Rural Development Act of 1972. This legislation brought together into one package many of the previously enacted federal programs relating to the development of rural areas. The Act of 1972 was funded by Congress the first time in October 1973, and also placed responsibility for coordinating all federal rural development activities in the hands of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Prior to the enactment of this Bill, rural development responsibilities were divided among many federal agencies.

The Act specifies that Federal rural development programs shall be programs of assistance designed to help local people help themselves. And it states clearly that such assistance shall be based on the idea that rural development is a self-financing, self-liquidating process.

Federal and state assistance is now available to help local people with technical problems connected with organizing, planning, and carrying out our rural development. The Extension Service has over 600 full-time specialists helping rural people solve developmental problems. The Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, and other agencies also provide technical assistance. Financial assistance is also available in case local credit is inadequate. And, of course, research related to all phases of development is a federal responsibility.

The Rural Development Act of 1972 was unique in another way. It gave USDA the assignment of helping nonfarm rural development. And this is significant since

9.6 million people currently live on farms while 44.4 million Americans live in rural areas other than on farms.

There's disagreement also as to what rural development really is. Many look upon the process as mostly economic development. But it is far more than that. It is the development of people's abilities; it's the creation of community facilities and services, and the enhancement of the environment. Its aim is to add to the total well-being of rural people with strong emphasis on developing the kind of a community that makes possible more quality of life for residents.

There is the need for good schools and churches, health services, community services, and activities for the employees of the company and their families who must move into the area.

Rural development seeks, among other things, to create local job opportunities to help:

- curb rural America's outmigration;
- add to local economic, people, and tax bases;
- make local rural life a richer and fuller experience;
- preserve the small family farm by furnishing off-farm employment opportunities;
- stem the urbanward outflow of rural wealth;
- relieve the population pressure on cities.

Only time will tell whether or not this Act lives up to its early promise of being an effective vehicle for rebuilding Rural America.

Another federal institution relates to improving the quality of rural education. In 1971 the National Institute of Education, through its experimental schools branch, began the development of an educational assistance program designed exclusively for the rural and small school. The development process included

Investigation of innovation in small schools, extensive discussions with experts in rural education and rural life, and the preparation of regulations, guidelines, and procedures specifically designed to be responsive to the uniqueness of small schools in rural areas and to encourage their participation in the Experimental Schools program. An announcement of the Competition for Small Rural Schools was sent in March 1972, to every school district with 2,500 or fewer students; a total of over 13,500 districts. The response again indicated the interest of small school districts to participate in comprehensive change efforts. Over 350 applications were received.

Each of the applications received was submitted to careful review and analysis to select those sites to receive funding. The review methods included a number of steps, involving a variety of consultants, many of whom were familiar with rural school experience, since they were products of such schools. These procedures insured a rigorous, thorough evaluation of all letters of interest submitted.

A final review of the applications resulted in the selection of six school districts as five-year Experimental Schools sites. The following are the school districts that were selected:

Constantine (Michigan) Public Schools;
Craig (Alaska) City Schools;
Hancock County (Kentucky) Public Schools;
Perry County (Mississippi) Public Schools;
Quilcene and Brinnon (Washington) Public Schools; and
South Umpqua (Oregon) School Districts.

On the basis of all of the information and recommendations provided, it was determined that there were a number of additional sites which, although not sufficiently prepared to begin operations immediately, presented significant comprehensive

Ideas worthy of initiation. After another careful review of the applications in this group, including new information provided by persons familiar with the district, the following six sites were recommended to receive one-year planning grants leading toward full funding in order to further develop the ideas presented in the letters of interest:

Carbon County (Wyoming) School District #2;
Lead-Deadwood (South Dakota) Public Schools;
Okolona (Mississippi) Public Schools;
School Supervisory Union #58 (New Hampshire);
Wilcox (Arizona) Public School District; and
Hallock, Humboldt-St. Vincent, Karlstad, Kennedy and
Lancaster (Minnesota) School Districts.

By 1977 it is hoped that data will be made available on the program's impact. The question which needs to be answered is - "How effective have those programs been in meeting the educational needs of the community?"

Perhaps this was an outgrowth of the U.S. Office of Education's "Task Force Report on Rural Education" which in 1968 recommended the following:

- (a) Establish a rural unit in the United State Office of Education.
- (b) Develop and adequately fund a National Center for Rural Education.
- (c) Establish one or more model rural schools.
- (d) Induce the various states to take appropriate action.
- (e) Provide incentive funds to teachers in rural areas.
- (f) Provide incentive funds for shared services.
- (g) Provide funds to support interstate councils or commissions.

Unfortunately the recommendations, in large part, have been ignored. Yet they could serve as a catalyst for action under a pro-education administration. At least the seed had been sown, only time will tell whether or not it bears fruit.

Broader federal programs with a strong rural component is found in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) funded by the federal government. ERIC is an Information system designed to help teachers, principals, education specialists, administrators, school board members, parents, students, and researchers obtain current and historical information in the field of education. As a project of the National Institute of Education, ERIC acquires, abstracts, indexes, stores, retrieves, and disseminates the most significant and timely reports and other materials. The primary objective of this system is to provide the acquired information quickly and inexpensively to a wide variety of users.

ERIC consists of a coordination staff, supportive technical sub-contractors, plus 16 decentralized clearinghouses, each one focusing on a separate area of education.

ERIC/CRESS (Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools) is responsible for acquiring, abstracting, indexing, and disseminating documents related to all aspects of American Indian Education, Mexican American Education, Migrant Education, Outdoor Education, Rural Education, and Small Schools. Documents submitted to CRESS include research reports, newsletters, conference papers, bibliographies, curriculum guides, speeches, journal articles, and books. ERIC/CRESS is located on the campus of New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Bibliographies and state-of-the-art papers are prepared and disseminated by CRESS. CRESS is staffed to answer requests pertaining to the use of the ERIC system in general as well as the operations of the Clearinghouse itself. Staff members can also provide consultation services on the establishment and use of information centers. CRESS is equipped to conduct computer searches through the entire ERIC files, including both RIE and CIJE.

RIE (Research In Education) is a monthly abstract journal published by the Government Printing Office. RIE contains abstracts of documents from the Clearinghouse

network; abstracts of on-going research projects; and indexes by subject, institution, and author or principal investigator. Articles from selected journals are indexed in CIJE (Current Index to Journals in Education) published monthly by Macmillan Information Corporation in New York City. More than 700 journals are indexed, some cover-to-cover and others whenever the articles have some relationship to education.

Another development, which owes its renaissance in part to Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, is that of regional education districts of agencies. The idea is not new, in 1829 Delaware created the office of "County Superintendent Schools" and abandoned it later - the grandfather, if you will, of the modern "service agency." For those not conversant with school administration theory and practice, a short review of state school systems might be appropriate.

There are 3 basic administrative patterns which are --

- (1) One-echelon, where all control is in the hands of a single-agency - the State Department of Education. Hawaii is the only state utilizing the one-echelon system.
- (2) Two-echelon system - in which control is shared between the state department of education and the local education agency or school district. States having the two-tiered system include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia.
- (3) The three echelon system - Involves the state department of education, some intermediate agency like "Regional Education Service Agency" and the local education agency. The 32 states having a three-echelon system are --
California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa,

Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

Historically, the intermediate agency has been the county, which has performed regulatory and administrative functions for the state. However, in recent years, especially since the mid-1960's, intermediate units in several states have become increasingly service oriented. In some of these states the single county is still the organizational unit; in others, the county unit has been abolished in favor of a new intermediate unit, the RESA.

It should be understood that many states have developed single and/or multi-purpose regional cooperatives on a voluntary basis. Although these units are not classified as intermediate units, their service function is basically the same: to provide services which single districts could not possibly provide on an individual basis. Each of the 32 three-echelon states has some form of regional educational cooperation.

The regional cooperative also offers the solution to the problem of delivery of services to students who are separated by miles, but joined by similar problems. The challenge of delivery has always been one of getting the children to the services or the services to the children, particularly in the isolated, sparsely settled regions with transportation problems in the West where distances are great, in the Appalachians over mountainous roads, and in New England and the upper Middle West where the winters are severe.

In addition, one of the main benefits of receiving an education in a small rural school--close teacher-pupil relationships--remains intact. The rural schools in particular have the experience to exercise positive leadership in this area--

experience that can ease the learning process for large urban schools that are now trying to make a student feel less like a punched, staples, and mutilated computer card and more like a "person" in a humane education system.

Current multi-district organizations range all the way from those which provide purely a planning function to those operating specific programs. Many serve only the school districts in a single county while others are large multi-county operations. No single type of regional service agency is appropriate for all areas or regions. Local conditions and needs should form the basis upon which a regional organization is designed.

However, a core of services should be readily available to each American child, youth and adult, irrespective of residence or the local community's financial ability. Where individual local education agencies are financially unable to do so, provided that they are making a reasonable effort to do so, regional centers, cooperatively developed and using a combination of local, state and federal funds can result in improved educational opportunities for rural people. Services which these centers may provide include those to children, teachers, administrators and the community itself.

Services to children would include, among others:

- (a) special education services and programs
- (b) vocational educational programs
- (c) health and nutritional programs
- (d) transportation services
- (e) psychological services
- (f) special services
- (g) programs of cultural enrichment

Services relating to personnel could include:

- (a) teacher recruitment
- (b) assignments and supervision of staff

- (c) curriculum development
- (d) the design and production of instructional material
- (e) audio-visual services
- (f) In-service programs

Administrative services might include:

- (a) comprehensive planning
- (b) research and evaluation of programs
- (c) planning of school buildings
- (d) centralized purchasing
- (e) writing proposals for funding of programs
- (f) dissemination of information to professional and lay people

Services to the community could include:

- (a) social service of families
- (b) programs of cultural enrichment
- (c) adult and continuing education programs

Numerous small rural school districts have banded together, forming Regional Educational Cooperatives. Through this mechanism small rural schools can share staff and resources in order to supply high quality education at a reasonable cost.

One such center is the bi-state venture serving 100 small school districts in 17 counties of North Dakota and Minnesota. This "Upper Red River Valley Educational Service Center" is located in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Services of this center include providing psychological testing, diagnosis, and counseling and guidance services; assisting schools to develop and implement high quality in-service programs for teachers; providing programs of cultural enrichment to the schools and their communities; and acting as a catalytic agent and resource agency in promoting and developing curricula and instructional improvement for its constituent school districts.

An ingenious program has been designed by three widely separated school districts in Southern California: San Bernardino, Inyo, and Mono. They have a shared service program in art. Since many, if not most, of the children residing in these rural areas have never seen works of art, let alone been taught to draw and use art materials, the school districts jointly converted a school bus into a museum on wheels. Personnel from Southern California art museums, colleges, and universities, and local civic and cultural organizations provide expertise, advice, and assistance to this project.

Very similar in purpose, with another component, is the "Project Mid-Tennessee." This children's museum, dubbed the "Yellow Submarine" by the children, is a large tractor trailer which brings various educational exhibits to the rural students on a rotating basis.

In addition, the lives of these students have been enriched through visits of the Nashville Symphony. Prior to the visits, pre-concert materials are provided to the classroom teachers; after the concert, informal conferences between musicians and students are held. Provision is made for music clinics as a follow-up activity. These clinics, designed to generate local interest in continuing musical programs, are conducted by orchestra members for musicians of the area.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory has developed and field tested a home-oriented program for pre-school education of three, four, and five year olds living in sparsely settled areas. The program is designed around a daily television lesson which is beamed by a commercial station and viewed by the child and parent at home. On a weekly schedule a para-professional visits the child's home to counsel with the mother as well as bringing materials for the following week's program. Once each week, group instruction is provided in a mobile classroom which is located near the child's home. The cost of this program is estimated to be only 50 percent of the conventional kindergarten program. Project DILENOWISCO, a corporation in Virginia, has taken this model, developed by the lab, and has successfully imple-

mented the program. This is an excellent example of the type of contribution which the regional education laboratories should, but rarely do, make to local school districts.

Although many school administrators consider the time students spend on buses getting to and from school as being "non-productive," the ones representing the Gunnison Watershed School District (Colorado) have demonstrated that the traveling time of students can be utilized in a most constructive manner.

This school district, encompassing some 3,200 square miles, enrolls approximately 1,500 students, many of whom spend 40 hours or more each month riding the school bus to and from school. To meet this challenge one of the regular school buses has been redesigned as a learning center through the use of electronic equipment, including a seven channel audiotape-deck complete with individual head sets. Thus, each student can control the volume and is able to select any of the seven channels. Three of the seven channels are reserved for differing age groups, one is utilized exclusively by AM radio programs, and the three remaining channels are reserved for special independent study. Each student receives a weekly "Listening Guide" listing the programs for the week. In addition to tapes designed for supplementary and environment activities, tapes of appropriate special events at the school or in the community are broadcast.

The foregoing illustrates that there is no one pattern of school district organization superior to any other. That innovation is limited only by the imagination, commitment and dedication of the educational leaders in the community. "Lighthouse schools" exist in all parts of the country, all size school districts as well as both "rich" and "poor" school districts.

The last of the emerging concept and program whose time has come is the re-emergence of the "community school concept." In 1954 the Department of Rural Education's Yearbook was devoted to "The Community School and the Intermediate Unit." We are

not concerned here with the Mott Program which is essentially an add-on, dealing mostly with recreation; but rather the concept used by Clapp in 1934 when she used the term "Community School" designed to provide community education services to a Kentucky Community. She stated:

"A school in a rural district has a unique opportunity to function socially....A community school foregoes its separateness. It is influential because it belongs to the people. They share its ideas and ideals and its work. It takes from them as it gives to them. There are no bounds as far as I can see to what it could accomplish in social reconstruction if it had enough wisdom, insight, devotion and energy. It demands all these, for changes in living and learning are not produced by imparting information about different conditions or by gathering statistical data about what exists, but by creating by people, with people, for people."

Unfortunately, this concept hasn't been widely accepted or implemented. However, there is a re-examination of the merits of the "Community School" concept as well as an awareness that schools should be community based, community oriented, and of service to the community.

Another area of hope for the small and rural schools is in the organization of the small schools into associations devoted to their improvement. The first of the modern efforts, funded by the Ford Foundation, was called the "Rocky Mountain Small School Project," re-named the "Western States Small School Project." Unfortunately, when Foundation support lapsed, so did the project. Although many ideas and concepts were tested (flexible scheduling, term teaching, individualized instruction) little was done to maintain the program so that those successful innovations could be

replicated elsewhere. One other fatal weakness was the lack of real commitment on the part of the school system to continue after project funds ran out.

The Catskill Area Study Council, headquartered at Oneonta, New York, still functions effectively, serving the needs of their constituent school districts in the Catskill area of New York.

However the most successful program of small school improvement is in Texas. The Texas Small Schools Project has been effective for two reasons (1) the commitment of the Texas Education Agency and (2) all funds come from the constituent district as opposed to outside foundation funding. For those interested in obtaining more information about this program, write to Dale Carmichael, Texas Small Schools Project, Texas Education Agency, Austin.

Another on-going program, but on a smaller scale, is the Oregon Small School Project. It does have some support from the state department of education as well as from its constituent school districts. Don Miller is director and can be contacted through the State Department of Education, Salem, Oregon.

Rural teachers increasingly understand that they must organize themselves into strong associations if they are to have any real effect upon the educational program at the local level. They have seen the real gains - economical - political - and as a force in curriculum improvement. The education association has a stake in what happens to the rural and small school. The Washington Education Association realized that the rural teachers' unique problems, the solution to which cannot be based on urban models, so they have created the small schools committee to serve their constituency. Currently they are concentrating on (1) preparing a guidebook on negotiation for the smaller school, and (2) designing governance documents for the small education association. Phil Reiter is the chairman of the committee and can be contacted at Post Office Box 267, Concrete, Washington 98237.

In addition there are new organizations cropping up whose concern is "rural." One of them is centered in Walthill, Nebraska and is known as the "Center of Rural Affairs." It is, in my judgment, having a pronounced effect within the state, particularly in the area of agriculture. Unfortunately, as is true of many organizations, adequate financing is a problem. It takes money to publish newsletters, hold conferences, and pay staff. The Center for Rural Affairs is no exemption. Sample copies of their newsletter can be obtained for 35¢ by writing to them in care of Box 405, Walthill, Nebraska 68067.

The only national association concerned exclusively with rural education is the Rural Education Association, currently having departmental status with the National Education Association. Effective this fall, REA will change its relationship from department to a non-governance affiliate. The Association grew out of the Department of Rural and Agricultural Education authorized by the NEA Board of Directors in 1907, reorganized under the name of Department of Rural Education in 1919; renamed Rural Education Association in October 1969. Membership includes teachers; local, county, and intermediate administrators and their staffs; state department and college or university staff members; and others concerned about education in a rural society.

Its purposes are --

To improve and expand educational opportunities in rural areas and smaller communities throughout the United States; to engage in research projects and studies and provide information concerning rural education to its members and the general public; to encourage research; to endeavor to focus attention on rural educational problems; and to coordinate with other organizations with purposes similar to those of the REA.

Currently the Association publishes a newsletter 6 times a year, plus an occasional paper. In addition, it co-sponsors with AASA an annual conference on rural-regional education programs. The conference for 1975 is slated for San Antonio, Texas, October 19-21. Further information regarding the conference or the Association can be obtained by contacting Charles Bitters, Conference Chairman, Box 5199, San Angelo, Texas 76901.

In order to better serve its membership, the Association has relocated its Field Office to the School of Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The Field Representatives are Dr. E. Dale Doak and Dr. O. K. O'Fallon. Currently the following types of membership are available: Active @ \$10, Life @ \$250, and Institutional @ \$35. More information may be obtained through the Field Office.

We can feel confident about the future of the rural and small schools for the following reasons:

- (1) The renewed interest and concern over the plight of rural education by society in general
- (2) The federal commitment in recognition that rural exists; it has problems and the federal government has a major role to play in creating solutions to these problems
- (3) The commitment of NIE to the Rural Experimental Program
- (4) The continual funding of ERIC/CRESS
- (5) The emergence of Regional Education Service agencies (educational corporations) designed to serve the rural and small school clientele
- (6) The linkage between the Appalachian Regional Lab and the local schools districts in moving from the development stage to actual implementation of the programs such as the pre-school one designed for rural children

- (7) The re-emergence of the "Community School" Concept
- (8) The myriad of agencies and organizations at the local, state and national level concerned with rural and rural education.
- (9) The movement by teachers and teacher organizations in joining the battle to improve the quality of education available to children, youth and adults attending rural and small schools
- (10) Conferences such as those where people get together, share ideas and go back home to work toward rural and community improvement through the schools.

I know of no better way to end this presentation than to quote from Howard A. Dawson's speech to the National Conference on Rural Education, sponsored by the Department of Rural Education, NEA , on September 28, 1974. He said:

"What lies before us is to buckle on the armor of courage, discharge our responsibilities, exercise our leadership, and make our performances catch up with our professions. I for one join with the President (President Kennedy) when he said in his memorable speech last May (1964) in New York: 'I ask you to march with me along the road of the future-- the road that leads to the Great Society where no child will go unfed and no youngster will ever go unschooled; where every child has a good teacher and every teacher has good pay, and both have good classrooms; where every human being has dignity and where every worker has a job; where education is blind to color and unemployment is unaware of race; where decency prevails and courage abounds.'"

The future is up to you in doing what you can - in your own way, in your own place, in your own time to ensure the continual improvement of the rural and small school as it seeks its "place in the sun."